

NATALKA'S PORTION¹

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SABINKA lay buried in snow. The hills, the forest, the lake, all lay hard, white, glittering, and the air also glittered and stung and cut.

Looking toward the village, the two rows of huts looked small, insignificant, mere specks of time-grayed timber weighed down with snow. Over each speck a thread of smoke rose, going straight up into the still, glittering air. Within, doors and windows sealed, the peasants huddled for warmth, here and there, together with their animals, to keep them alive, or for the life that they could give. In the chimneyless huts even the smoke was kept in for the warmth it gave. It poured from the oven into the room and hung there from the ceiling. Beneath it the peasants went about, their bodies bent to the ground. When at last the smoke settled on ceiling and walls they still went about bent, from habit now, and peering with weakened eyes.

Then winter ended! Suddenly, as if it spent itself in its own cruelty, it ended. The sun came out warm. From the ragged straw roofs of the huts the snow slipped and melted and fell in a thick shower. Birds appeared. The peasants came out to look at their fields. Their faces were sallow and pinched, and the smoke soaked into the skin showed plainer in the strong light.

The snow blackened with every moment, and suddenly the earth lay bare. The men began to scatter over the fields. The women tended nearer home.

One afternoon, when the air was sweet with the warmth and the moisture of the earth, and in the pastures about

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the village Sabinka a tint of green showed faintly, Katherina came to her husband, Gavrelo, where he was mending the fence around the field to be planted with wheat.

"Gavrelo," she said, "I have come to plead with you again about the marriage portion of our daughter Natalka." She stood meekly, a clumsy little body in a red plaid shawl. Her face was steaming with heat and perspiration, and her worn birch-bark sandals were clogged with earth from the soggy fields.

Gavrelo had not looked up when she had been coming to him through the fields, and now it was as if she were not there. Near him lay a pile of poles, a heap of freshly cut twigs and a hatchet. He selected a long, pliant twig and began twisting it in and out between two poles as a bar-rest. His face was sullen. He was short and wide and brown; his thick hair and beard, and worn homespun clothes, and his weather-beaten skin, all were brown. He was like the powerful trees about him, and, like these deep-rooted trees, he looked as capable of being moved.

Katherina turned her eyes away from him. It crushed her to see him so. It had always crushed her—even so long ago when he used to come to court her at her father's house—the way he would sit there of a Sunday, sullen, silent, never a kind word, never a smile, contrary, scowling at the whole world.

"Gavrelo," she repeated her sentences in a way peculiar to the people of Sabinka, "I have come to plead with you about Natalka's marriage portion." Her voice was full of restrained passion.

"Look, Gavrelo, at your home." She pointed to a hut across the great field. In one of the two dingy windows a young girl could be seen, though vaguely, at a spinning-board.

"There is your home. Moldy and rotten, it is sinking to the ground. You were supposed to have built twenty years ago, soon after we were married. All you have built are barns. There they stand, shaming your house. And there is your daughter, as pretty as the prettiest in Sabinka, in that rotting home. Yet, Gavrelo, have I ever pestered you about it? But now it is about Natalka that I beg you."

Her clumsy little body leaned toward him. But her voice became more patient, more restrained.

"Gavrelko!" She used the diminutive, and then stood dumbly looking down a moment. Yes, she could have cared for him if he had let her. "Gavrelko, you are not going to send Nataalka away without a portion to her husband's home, a strange home in a strange village! You are not going to do it!"

Dumb and silent, Gavrelo's scowl never relaxed. It was always so, always—except—except when he stood looking at his fields—at his wheat. Then his furrowed face smoothed and the light in his eyes reflected the light in the fields.

Gavrelo now selected a long pole, sharpened it, and began driving it into the ground. "Hagh!" his breath echoed, and the pole sank deep into the earth.

"And you have so much, Gavrelo." She glanced about. Their hut stood a good distance away from the village, and all surrounding it was Gavrelo's.

"All that, all about us is yours, and your barns are stacked with wheat. You will not send Nataalka away with empty hands." Her own clasped in agony. "You won't do it. I know, Gavrelo, how bitter it is to come with empty hands." Her head drooped, her voice sank low.

"I know how it is. I came to your home, Gavrelo, without a portion. My people were very poor. You have never thrown it up to me, Gavrelo, but your mother cast it in my face every day as long as she lived. And I was never able to lift my head."

Gavrelo's face was turned from her, and he worked on steadily.

"And Nataalka, too, is marrying into a large family. It is perhaps a disadvantage to marry into a large family. There are so many to find fault with your ways, a mother-in-law and sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law. All watching and criticizing you. And when you have come without a portion—Ach! Gavrelko! They will throw it up to her, the mother-in-law and the sisters-in-law—and—and even Simyonka—Simyonka is a fine fellow. And yet—in a

quarrel— would he not remember?" She began to weep passionately. "You won't do it, Gavrelo. And Nataalka has really earned it. You know how she can spin and weave. Her cloth is straight and fine. And during the harvest she has been among the quickest hands. You won't bring this shame upon her, Gavrelo!"

Gavrelo turned to her. At last she had touched him. His face was distorted with anger, and he stopped his work for a moment. "Why does she want to marry, the fool!" The words burst from him through his teeth, and he bent down to pick up his tools. He had finished the fence. Katherina stared at him.

"What—what else do you expect? Oh! It is a harvest hand you are thinking of!" Then realizing that he was going, she ran to him.

"Gavrelo!" she cried, "what do you say? What will you say when at the wedding Simyonka's father will ask, 'And what do you give Nataalka as her portion?' What will you say, Gavrelo?"

Gavrelo lifted a few poles to his shoulder and slipped the hatchet into his girdle. "I told you," he said doggedly. "Simyonka has enough!" And he walked away with his long, even stride, his sandals making deep prints in the soft earth.

Katherina staggered to the newly mended fence and buried her face in her arms. "*Ach, Boshi Moi!*" she cried. With the habit of the lonely she talked to herself. Gavrelo did not tolerate neighbors. Indeed, he was hated because of his hardness and meanness.

"Life is bitter," she wept. Her own had been a cruel fate.

"You have come like a beggar." Her mother-in-law had cast it in her face. And now her own fate was to be Nataalka's fate! And why? Because Gavrelo was an unnatural father, because he was stingy and cared for nothing—but—his fields, his wheat, more and more wheat. His barns were stacked with wheat. He kept them under lock and key, and he sowed still more wheat. She raised her head and looked about. This field was to be all wheat, acres and acres. And Nataalka was to go to her husband like a

beggar. "They will throw it up to her, the mother-in-law and the sisters-in-law. And Nataalka is young; she will never be able to lift her head!" Her own head sank into her arms again.

It was late when she started for the hut. The red sun hung on the very edge of the forest. She picked her way to a back road not far off which would be less soggy than the fields, though roundabout and longer. Trudging along, her eyes on the path, her sandals heavy with the mud, she at once upbraided and defended Gavrelo, and analyzed and schemed.

It would take so little to give Nataalka a fine portion. There, for instance, was the little pig, only a year old, but so aggressive that he had to be fed with the old hogs. Parshuchuck would be an excellent gift. He could take care of himself anywhere. Even in a litter of strange pigs he could hold his own. Also there was Chulka, a heifer, for whom no fence was too high. She used her knobby little horns with such skill that often won a long stare of surprise from the old cows. Chulka, too, could take care of herself in a strange herd. These two would be an excellent gift. It would be pleasant for little Nataalka to have something of her own that was alive, in a strange home, in a strange village. Parshuchuck and Chulka might even be an example to her, not to bend her head too low.

But what was the use in thinking about it? "Ach! The mean peasant! The unnatural father!" She stumbled, unable to see the path through her tears.

"Bah! They are fools, those wise men," she shook her head disgustedly. "They are fools who say that it is better to have a relative rich, though a miser, than one who is poor and generous. Both are like death. Can you take from the miser? Nor can you take from the one who has nothing to give."

Presently, on reaching a sudden turn in the road, she heard a merry voice babbling incoherent fits of song. That was Addom on his way home from the *kabock*. Addom was a drunkard. He drank like a fish. Addom, too, was often idle, she mused. Gavrelo never drank, though he liked a glass of vodka. But what would Gavrelo do in a

kabock where men talked as they drank? Gavrelo never talked to any one. He only worked. That was why her parents had made her marry him instead of Addom, who drank and who never kept his word, just as Gavrelo never broke his word. But Addom's daughter Anulia, who was also to marry this spring, was to receive one of her father's two cows as her wedding-gift. Anulia Addom also wore machine-made stockings which she bought from the Jewess Deborah—stockings and boots every Sunday! Natalka bound her ankles in cloths and wore birch-bark sandals to church. Katherina shook her head. A man who drank was perhaps better-natured, more generous.

Reaching the yard, she saw Natalka still in the window spinning.

Natalka was eighteen. She was small like her mother, but she was rosy and healthy. Her hair lay in two thick, brown braids on her back. Her faded red kerchief was tied with a coquettish knot, and her little round nose had a mischievous tilt. But just now she was neither coquettish nor mischievous. She was very earnest. Her wedding was to be the first in the village this spring, and she was hurrying to finish all her mother's spinning before it came. Her hands twirled the spindle rapidly; her head scarcely moved except to moisten the thread with her lips, or to extricate a knot in the flax with her small white teeth.

Katherina watched her a moment. Should she tell her—that her father would send her away with empty hands? No! There was time enough. But as she stood watching she saw Natalka stop her work suddenly; her hands became still, her head drooped for a moment. In agony, Katherina wondered. Could she know, then? Perhaps she guessed! Katherina turned away from the window.

About the yard all the buildings stood facing in a semi-circle, the hut, the barns, the pig-pen, the chicken-coop. Katherina went toward the coop. In the barn she heard Gavrelo. He rarely forgot the keys. "He rarely forgets them," she muttered to herself. The corners of her mouth lifted firmly. "Well, Natalka shall have a fine trousseau, anyway. Her *kubial*, at any rate, shall not go off empty!"

Late that night the full moon rose, and Sabinka, with its

two rows of huts, its hills and dales and lakes, lay transformed in silver light.

In the shadow of the fences a woman went stealing along. Climbing, here forcing a way through the bars, running a step where the shadow broke, and again lingering where it resumed, she reached a small hut standing in the full light. She rapped on the door and shook the latch impatiently.

"Open, Deborah!" she whispered. "It is I, Katherina." A tall, thin woman with a white kerchief about her head came out on the threshold.

"So late, Katherina!"

"Yes, and I must hurry back. Here." Katherina took a large ball of thread from her *swita* pocket. "You are to knit a pair of stockings for my daughter Nataalka's wedding," she whispered. "But mind, Jewess," her voice rose suspiciously, "you are to return to me what is left of the thread."

"We are not thieves!" came from Deborah in a tone hurt, yet patient.

"Well, perhaps not," Katherina said, softening slightly. "Perhaps not. But all Jews are swindlers."

"We are what we are forced to be." Restraint and infinite patience were in Deborah's voice. Hesitating an instant, she turned suddenly. "Look, Katherina, would you not much rather come along the road, in the light of day, to order stockings for Nataalka, instead——"

"Do you mean to insinuate, Jewess?" Katherina flamed.

"No, no," Deborah hastened to assure her. "I am not insulting you. I am not blaming you. I just want you to see, Katherina, how one may be forced to become what one does not want to be."

"Well," said Katherina, somewhat mollified, "I suppose so. I suppose Jews, like people, have their troubles."

Carefully she put her hand into her bosom and counted slowly six eggs into the apron Deborah held out. "There," she said, brushing her hands with an air as if the transaction was quite satisfactorily completed.

"My dear Katherina!" Deborah exclaimed, "you expect me to knit a pair of stockings for six eggs?"

"How much then?" Katherina's voice was suspicious again and cross.

"Twelve, Katherina; at least twelve. This is not winter, you know."

"In the next village——"

"I know," Deborah broke in. "In the next village lives a Jewess who knits a pair of stockings for six eggs. Don't believe it, Katherina. It's a fairy-tale. Anyway, I cannot do it. We have to live, too. And little Miriam is growing up. There is no chance for a penniless girl here, a girl without a dowry." Deborah's voice came brooding.

Katherina put her hand into her *swita* again. The trouble of a dowry she could easily understand.

"Here, Deborah," she said sympathetically, "here are twelve eggs. But remember every inch of the thread you are to return. And don't let your blind mother-in-law knit the stockings. She might drop a stitch!"

A whispered good night followed, and Katherina stole forth into the shadows again.

The village peeped through a mist of tender green buds. Warm sunshine, dazzling blue skies were continuous. Scattered over the fields far and near the peasants were. Mere specks between earth and sky, their bodies moved slowly, heavily, all day long. Nearer the homes the women labored, digging in the gardens, bleaching at the lake. At dawn and after dark they took the time to prepare for the weddings in the village.

When the mud in the road had dried a peddler came driving through the village with summer finery and pots to sell.

"Pots to sell! Earthen pots to sell!" the peddler cried in a ringing voice. And the dogs barked, and the children stared, and the women left their work and hurried to the wagon with their bundles of rags.

Katherina was digging a draining-canal between two long beds in the garden. When the peddler stopped at her gate she left her spade and looked around. Natalka was at the lake bleaching. And Gavrelo—she could see him in a far field, his arm swinging rhythmically back and forth. Hastening to the outhouse, she came out with two bundles,

one of rags, and one small sackful of wheat. She carried it with difficulty and threw it over the fence into the road, where it lay hidden among some weeds.

"Did you see, little Jew?" she called to the peddler. "It is wheat!"

"I saw," the peddler answered significantly. He was as accustomed to this kind of transaction among the peasants as they themselves were.

Katherina hurried out to the wagon and climbed onto the axle.

"Quick, little Jew, let me see what you have. And don't think you can rob me. Wheat is dear now! Have you ribbons? And I want two red bandannas, but of different patterns. And show me beads. Have you got rings? Yes, show me that one with the red stone."

And the peddler measured, using the length of his arm, and watched Katherina. And she picked and fussed and worried in indecision, her eyes never quite leaving the distant field where Gavrelo was working.

Her selections made finally, she gathered them into her apron jealously, and a haggling ensued between the two, not unlike the transaction some weeks earlier at Deborah's hut.

"Now, peddler, how much? That sack of wheat is almost a bushel."

"Almost!" he cried. "That should have been a full bushel for all you have taken."

"Don't shriek!" she paled. "There are those rags. What do you give for the rags?"

"The rags go to make up the full bushel of wheat." His dark eyes snapped.

"Oh, very well," she said. "Take it! Take it! You are a robber." She climbed down and hurried away. The peddler threw his bundles into the wagon and touched his pony with the end of his whip, his dark eyes measuring the distance to the next hut.

Katherina breathed a sigh of relief as his wagon creaked away, and she slowly entered the deep interior of the out-house which adjoined the living room. It was late afternoon, and the road was hot and dusty. But here it was

cool and dark; the only light came from the door opening on the garden path.

In the dimmest corner Nataalka's *kubial* stood, filled with her trousseau. Katherina reached it by a small step-ladder and dipped down into its tank-like body. She touched and patted the cool, smooth linens, heavily embroidered and plain pieces. She added the newly-purchased treasures. Yes, Nataalka's *kubial* was filling—but of the portion there was no prospect. She sighed hopelessly. There was no prospect, and the day of the wedding was drawing nearer. Gavrelo had ordered vodka from the *kabock*, and told her she might have all the pork she wanted for the wedding-feast. But that was all. Nataalka must enter into a strange family owning nothing, come with nothing belonging to her, nothing familiar. Everything she will look at will be strange, his! Nothing that she had brought, that she could feel pride in. "*Ach, Boshi Moi!*"

She finally climbed down the ladder. It had grown late. Outside the mellow sunset lay full on the path and the bit of road she could see before the gate. But in the outhouse the dimness was quite deep. And the living room, through its door, looked out at her, a dark hole with its sooty walls; the two tiny windows in it admitted but little light. Only one bright spot—the icon in vivid red and blue of the "Gracious Mother" looked out at her from the dimness.

"*Boshi Moi!*" Katherina's eyes went out to it in a dumb appeal, "*Boshi Moi!*" Wearily she sat down after a moment on the lower step of the ladder. Voices came from the road. Presently she saw, from her seclusion, Nataalka and Simyonka enter through the gate. Their young forms stood out clean, clear, in the soft light. This was Simyonka's market day, she remembered. He had evidently met Nataalka at the lake on his way from market. They were talking heatedly. The little chit Nataalka was arguing, smiling, coquetting. The youth seemed to be entreating her, begging earnestly. Simyonka was not much older than Nataalka. He was tall and lean and brown, clean-featured, clean-looking in his coarse, home-spun linen. Katherina watched, and her soul filled with gratitude that he was so beautiful, for Nataalka.

They came a few steps nearer on the garden path and she caught their words.

"Just one! Just one, Nataalka!" His face was lifted. His eyes were beseeching her. And Nataalka, laughing, radiant, mischievous, turned and was backing away from him toward the house, her hand raised between them.

"Lublue ya tibya." (I love thee.)

With the palm of her hand against his mouth, she pressed him away. He was murmuring, "You are like a little flower, Nataalka. You are like a little birch-tree, a little white birch growing in the field."

Katherina's own face was radiant. *"Ya tibya lublue."* He loves her! Yes, he loves her. She herself had never known such love. "Simyonka loves Nataalka!" The words filled her with dizzy joy.

Then her face twisted with agony. But soon, very soon, he would look upon her with shame! At once! At her wedding! His father will ask Gavrelo, "What is your daughter's portion?" And Gavrelo will say, "Nothing!" And the whole vilage will laugh and jeer. And little Nataalka will bend her head with shame. And later, again, when he brings her home and the villagers and relatives gather about him, and he has nothing of hers that he could tell them she brought, that he could show—

She rose. Carried away by this thought, she no longer saw nor heard them outside, and she went staggering into the living room of the hut and fell upon her knees before the icon.

"Gracious Mother Maria!" Her clumsy little body crumpled to the hard-trodden earth.

"Blessed Mother Maria, can you hear me?" she pleaded in the crude way of Sabinka people. "Can you hear me? I have come to beg of you for Nataalka. You know, Mother, I have never come to you for myself. But now I come for her. Mother," her voice rose brokenly, "you know how hard my life has been. At home when I was young we were so poor. Often I was hungry for just bread. In marriage—Gavrelo is a strange person." She fell silent a moment, her tears choking her.

"The children were all I had. And when little Zacharka

died I felt as if my heart would break, Mother. He was so sweet to look at with his golden hair and blue eyes. He would have been fifteen years old now. Oh, Mother! It is hard; it has been hard to see other little lads in the village and not see Zacharka. In the spring, when the sky is blue, and the fields are covered with grass, I miss little Zacharka. I miss him when from each home in the village a little lad goes forth with his father's herd. The mothers wait for them all day, and in the evening they meet them at the gate. I, too, wait all day, but it is a strange little lad that brings our cattle home." She lay still, sobbing brokenly.

"It has been hard, Mother Maria. Yet, have I complained? But now I beg pity for Nataalka." Her hands clasped, her forehead pressed to the earth. "Pity, Mother, pity for Nataalka!"

The trees were in full leaf. The meadows were dotted with the first flowers. The wheat in the great field stood a foot high. It was Saturday at dusk. The cattle had long passed, and the dust they had stirred was laid. Swarms of tiny insects danced in the open spaces of the road. Far out frogs croaked at regular intervals. The air was warm and sweet with the breath of the flowers and the dew. The village seemed quietly at rest. Yet there was a silent stir—preparation for the morrow, the first wedding in Sabinka this spring.

The fence enclosing Gavrelo's hut was strung with branches of green foliage. High over the gate a wreath of orange-colored flowers hung to mark the bride's dwelling. Inside the yard was swept clean and sprinkled with yellow sand, and long benches stood along the walls. On the doorstep of the outhouse Nataalka sat with her two bridesmaids trimming her veil. Nataalka herself was making the little rosettes of red or green ribbon, and the maids stitched them on all over the long strip of white muslin. The maids were talking and giggling, their heads bent over their work. Nataalka was quiet and solemn.

In the deep interior of the outhouse Katherina was giving the last touches to the *kubial*. She lifted and replaced and folded and finally fitted the cover and slipped in the

bar. It was done! Her hands fell at her sides. Katherina had grown thinner, paler, more pinched. Since she prayed before the icon she had spent the time from day to day, from hour to hour, waiting. But nothing—nothing had happened to save Nataalka. Since that hour at dusk, she, Katherina, had spent morning and night kneeling before the icon. She had been to the cemetery many times, where her dead were laid, and hung their moldy wooden crosses with new little aprons of many colors. She had watched Gavrelo from day to day, hoping for a sign of relenting, of softening. But none had come. Sullen, stolid, he went about as usual, working early and late in the fields and at the barns, only coming in to eat his three meals of black bread and cabbage soup, and to sleep the few hours between the extreme dark and early dawn. Standing there, she could hear him now at the barns, still working—still working—while others were long at rest.

"Ach, Gavrelo!" she cried to him silently, "what is it all for? What are you doing it for, Gavrelo?" She lifted her coarse apron and wiped away stinging tears.

The shadow before the door had just fallen on the threshold. By clock time it would have been perhaps ten in the morning. A wagon lined with green leaves and buttercups, harnessed to four pair, stood at the gate in the road. The horses were snorting and beating the ground impatiently, and a sturdy youth sat holding the reins mightily. Within, the yard flashed with color—red, short, wide skirts, blue and green streamers, red bandannas, white shirts, patent-leather boots, sparkling black or green beads, shining brass buttons.

The guests sat primly on the benches along the walls, chanting solemnly. Katherina and Gavrelo sat among the elders of the village. Gavrelo looked browner in a well-bleached shirt, and he was the only man who wore birch sandals instead of boots. Katherina sat beside him, her head swathed in a white linen scarf decorated with little red crosses. Her head was bowed, her hands were folded in her lap, her face as white as her scarf. Simyonka, in patent leather boots and white shirt, looked solemn. Nataalka was tearful. Nataalka looked like some strange

wild-flower, a poppy perhaps, with all the red and green, and her loose brown hair. Her scarf flashed with every possible color. Her skirt was red; her breast was covered with many strings of beads.

Suddenly the chanting stopped. A hush fell. Solemnly, between her two maids, the bride rose to ask a blessing of her parents before starting for church. She walked with studied and becoming dignity, her head bowed, her hands clasped in front of her. She reached her parents. And here she forgot her rôle. Overcome by emotion, she fell upon her knees rather clumsily, humanly, and a low cry, half song, half wail of the braid song, pierced the air.

"Boshi Moi——"

"My braids—my beautiful brown braids."

Blindly and convulsed, Katherina rose and made the sign of the cross over her. Gavrelo did the same. Katherina watched, still watched and hoped for a sign of relenting. But his face looked more stubborn than ever. And Katherina now suddenly knew that she must not expect him to relent. When had Gavrelo ever relented that she should have expected it? Fool that she was! It had always been just the contrary even when it was to his own disadvantage. His word given became law. Fool that she was to have expected Gavrelo to change his word!

Meanwhile, Nataalka, kneeling before each guest for a blessing, reached the gate. There was a burst of song. All pressed forward. The horses pranced, a whip cracked and a cloud of dust rose before the gate, and the bride was gone. Katherina and Gavrelo followed in a vehicle. Dazed and crushed, she was sped along. What could now happen? The beginning of Nataalka's shame a mere few hours off.

Noise and confusion filled the yard. There was a babble of voices, thick voices, incoherent, affectionate, querulous, crying of children, snatches of song, the strains of a fiddle rising a moment over the clamor, a rhythmic thomp, thomp of dancing feet.

It was late in the afternoon. The bridal pair had long returned from church. The yard was now divided in two parts. One-half was occupied by the dancers, and in the

other half two long tables stood spread with food—roast pork, dishes heaped with sour pickles glistening in juice, salt herring, thick slices of black bread, tall green bottles of vodka, white and stinging.

The guests sat about the tables, while the children clamored at their elders' elbows. The feast was at its height. Among the men several of the guests already lay under the table. Of the women most were intoxicated. Some sat wagging their heads. Others were awakened now and then to shrill merriment. Still others drank little and sat chanting solemnly, keeping up dutifully the burden of the rites.

In the dancers' corner several couples whirled in a quadrille. In one of these Natalka flashed in and out. Natalka's face was still solemn and dignified. But a twinkle of mischief and coquettishness was in her eyes. Her husband was dancing in the same quadrille. Whenever they had to dance opposite each other her eyes teased him; her little red hand extended and withdrew half-way, and Simyonka was tantalized and radiant.

Further a circle of young folk surrounded the great-grandfather of the village, dancing a jig.

His hands on his hips, his white beard flowing, his head high, a smile on his lips, his aged limbs performed with wonderful agility. He toed to the right, he toed to the left, here he crossed, there he kneeled. And the fiddlers fiddled with all their might, and the women clapped, and the men cheered and stamped.

"Trala-lala-lala."

At one table Katherina sat among her guests. Leaning to this one and that one, she urged:

"Another piece of pork? Some more *kvass*?" She herself neither ate nor drank. Her face was ashen white. Her eyes were fastened on Gavrelo, who sat at the side of Simyonka's father. At the other table Gavrelo, urged by Simyonka's father, had drunk deeply. This was the second time in his life he had drunk. His face was purple, he talked incoherently, and he sat gazing about him helplessly, as if he could not make out what had happened to him. Simyonka's father was leaning on the table to keep

his balance; but being accustomed to vodka he had not quite lost his wits.

"You—you half a fine stock of cattle," he told Gavrelo, dealing him a complimentary blow on the back. "You half fine cowsh!"

Gavrelo threw his head back to drain a glassful, and drew it back with difficulty, then sat swaying.

"Fine cowsh," mumbled Simyonka's father. Gavrelo turned his head and eyed his new relative with a vacant stare. Then came the dreaded question. Katherina, watching from her table, sat as still as if cut from stone.

"What—what ish Nataalka's portion, Gavrelo?" Many bleared eyes were turned on Gavrelo. This would be the first time Gavrelo had given anything in his life. Some of the villagers actually sobered for a moment and stared.

"Nataalka's portion?" Simyonka's father insisted with drunken stubbornness.

Suddenly Katherina's face turned from its ashen pallor to a live red. Oh, yes! Yes! She would! Why not? She would do it, yes, she would! Or why would it have come into her head? Could it be that the Sacred Mother had not forgotten her? She sat a moment staring stupidly, then rose quickly, elbowed her way to her husband and stood at his side.

"Nataalka's portion?" Simyonka's father clamored with piggish persistence. His voice rose to a squeal. Katherina bent over Gavrelo and whispered.

"Say Parshuchuck."

"Parshuchuck," Gavrelo repeated, and looked up at her as though he were trying to recognize her.

"Nataalka's portion a pig!" the father-in-law called out to the guests.

"And Chulka," Katherina again whispered to her husband. Gavrelo stared at her doubtfully, but repeated "Chulka."

"And the large field of wheat," Katherina urged hoarsely.

"Wheat!" repeated Gavrelo. His head fell forward and his mouth dripped water.

"Three pishes!" Simyonka's father bawled out.

"Three pieces!" It was repeated around the yard.

"Simyonka! You lucky hound!" a young man shrieked. All were now staring, eyes bleared, at the three. Nataalka came over to her mother. Her face looked white and scared.

"*Matushka!*" she exclaimed, "what have you done?" And Katherina suddenly realized that Nataalka had known all along that her father would give her nothing.

"It is all right," Katherina said. "Go dance. Go. But tell Simyonka to come and fetch his father-in-law to a cool place. And Nataalka—you better tell Simyonka to take the pig and the heifer tonight. The wheat you will get in the fall."

"But, *Matushka*——"

"It is all right, Nataalka. You know your father is a man of his word. Go dance."

A few minutes later Gavrelo lay stretched on a bench in the cool, dim outhouse. Nataalka and Simyonka were congratulated on their generous portion. New quadrilles were formed, a new jig was being danced. Katherina went back and sat among her guests. And as she clapped her hands for the dancers she wondered, "And what about the morrow? Will he think he did it of his own accord, or will he remember?" But what mattered the morrow? Just now Anulia Addom was screaming into her grandmother's deaf ear:

"Nataalka received three things, *Babushka*; you hear me, three things!" And Katherina clapped.

"Trala-lala-lala-lala."

"Ach, they were wise after all, those men," she thought; "they were wise who said that it is better to have a relative rich though a miser than one who is poor and generous. The miser, sooner or later, in one way or another, you may overcome. It is poverty that is like unto death."